
EQUIPPING THE SAINTS

“...FOR THE EQUIPPING OF THE SAINTS FOR THE WORK OF SERVICE...” ~ EPHESIANS 4:12



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TWELVE PERIODS OF BIBLE HISTORY

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In a previous article we looked at the three eras of human history. These are sometimes referred to as the Patriarchal, Mosaic, and Christian dispensations. In each of these periods God communicates his expectations in a different way. While making these distinctions is important, one must also realize that these eras cover large spans of time. Therefore, it may be helpful to further breakdown the Bible's events into smaller periods. Hopefully you will find the following twelve periods of Bible history helpful as you attempt to recognize the overall story of Scripture.

1. The Beginnings. The events of this period are recorded in Genesis 1–11. Well-known stories like the creation of the heavens and the earth, the first sin, Cain and Abel, Noah and the flood, and the Tower of Babel take place here. These events help set the stage for what is to follow by introducing the major characters of Scripture and describing the major problem needing a solution.

2. The Patriarchs. This period is described in Genesis 12–50. The stories of four major players are followed in this text: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. This section introduces us to the family through which God would bless the whole world. The threefold promise—land, nation, seed—is reiterated throughout this section.

3. The Exodus. The books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy tell of the events in this period. The central character becomes Moses as he leads Abraham's descendants, the Israelites, out of Egyptian captivity (where they had been for 400 years). The ten plagues, crossing the red sea, reception of the Law at Mt. Sinai, and wilderness wanderings occurred during this period.

4. The Conquest. God promised Abraham he would receive the land of Canaan as an inheritance. The book of Joshua explains how the Israelites came out of wilderness and conquered their God-given land. Joshua picks up as the leader of Israel after Moses's death.

5. The Judges. Despite God's instructions the people of Israel did not completely drive out the inhabitants of their land. Various nations arose and afflicted Israel over time. God, however, heard the cries of His disobedient people and sent them judges (i.e., military leaders) to defeat their enemies. The book of Judges tells us of these leaders: e.g., Gideon, Deborah, Samson, etc.

6. The United Kingdom. As time progressed the Israelites longed to be like the godless nations around them. They asked that a king rule over them. The books of Samuel and parts of Kings and Chronicles record the reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon.

7. The Divided Kingdom. The latter parts of Kings and Chronicles tell of the time when the Israelites were divided. Solomon's son, Rehoboam, caused a division between the tribes in the north and the tribes in the south. During this period of time the children of Israel were ruled by two kings: a northern king and a southern king.

8. The Exile. As a result of consistent sin God brought punishment on His people. First, the Assyrians conquered the northern tribes of Israel. Second, the Babylonians conquered the southern tribes of Israel. God's people were removed from their land and taken into captivity. This is how the books of Kings and Chronicles end. Many of the prophets foretold this captivity and worked during this exile.

9. The Return. Eventually God allowed the Persians to overcome the Babylonians. The Persian King allowed the Israelites to return home, rebuild their walls, rebuild their temple, and worship God again. These events are described in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

10. The Silence. The Old and the New Testament are separated by 400 years in which God did not speak through inspired authors. The events of this period, therefore, are not written in our Bibles. We do, however, know from historical records (including books like the Maccabees) that the Greeks came to power followed by the Romans. The Jews anticipated the Messiah and sought their liberation from these world powers during this time.

11. The Gospel. The books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John record the life of Jesus—the Messiah that was foretold throughout the Old Testament. Jesus, the Son of God, taught the message of His Kingdom: the Gospel. This Gospel climaxed in Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection.

12. The Church. After Jesus's resurrection He ascended to heaven. His disciples, however, continued propagating His Gospel message and building up His church (i.e., His group of followers). The actions and teachings of His disciples are recorded in the book of Acts and the various epistles that comprise the New Testament.

